

Fact Sheet: Living Survivors of California's Eugenic Sterilization Program

Background

In 1909, California state legislators passed a bill authorizing medical superintendents of state homes and hospitals to sterilize patients who they deemed unfit for reproduction. California went on to have the most active eugenic sterilization program in the United States, recommending over 20,000 people for the procedure (out of 60,000 total in 32 U.S. states). Poor people, people with disabilities, and Latina/os represent the communities most affected by eugenic sterilization. This law was not repealed until 1979.

Eugenic sterilization programs are now considered a major human rights abuse and California officials apologized for this historical wrong in 2003. California has a longer history of sterilization malfeasance, including the nonconsensual tubal ligations of Mexican-origin women at USC/LA County Hospital in the 1960s-1970s, and 150 unauthorized operations performed on female inmates in state prisons from 2006-2010.

The Facts: Today's Survivors

As many as **831** surviving

38% Male

62% Female

Mean age today: 88

Mean age when sterilized: 17

Living Survivors

Our estimate is derived from a dataset of almost 20,000 procedures recommended in 1919-1952, the peak era of sterilizations. Hundreds of victims are likely still alive today: most would be 80 or older. We estimate that [18% are Latina/o, 62% female, and the majority were sterilized at Sonoma State Home or Pacific Colony.](#)

Potential Redress

Given the advanced age of survivors, the time to act is now. California should consider following North Carolina and Virginia, states with sterilization policies that established compensation programs for victims. Furthermore, California can demonstrate leadership by exploring additional forms of redress and recognition including reproductive justice training, historical markers to honor victims, and development of K-12 curriculum to ensure the history and legacy of eugenics is not forgotten.

State Sterilization Redress Programs

	Year	Amount
N. Carolina	2013	\$50,000 per survivor
Virginia	2015	\$25,000 per survivor

Produced by the California Eugenic Sterilization Research Group – contact us at california-eugenics@umich.edu

For our full publication on this topic, visit: <http://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/abs/10.2105/AJPH.2016.303489>